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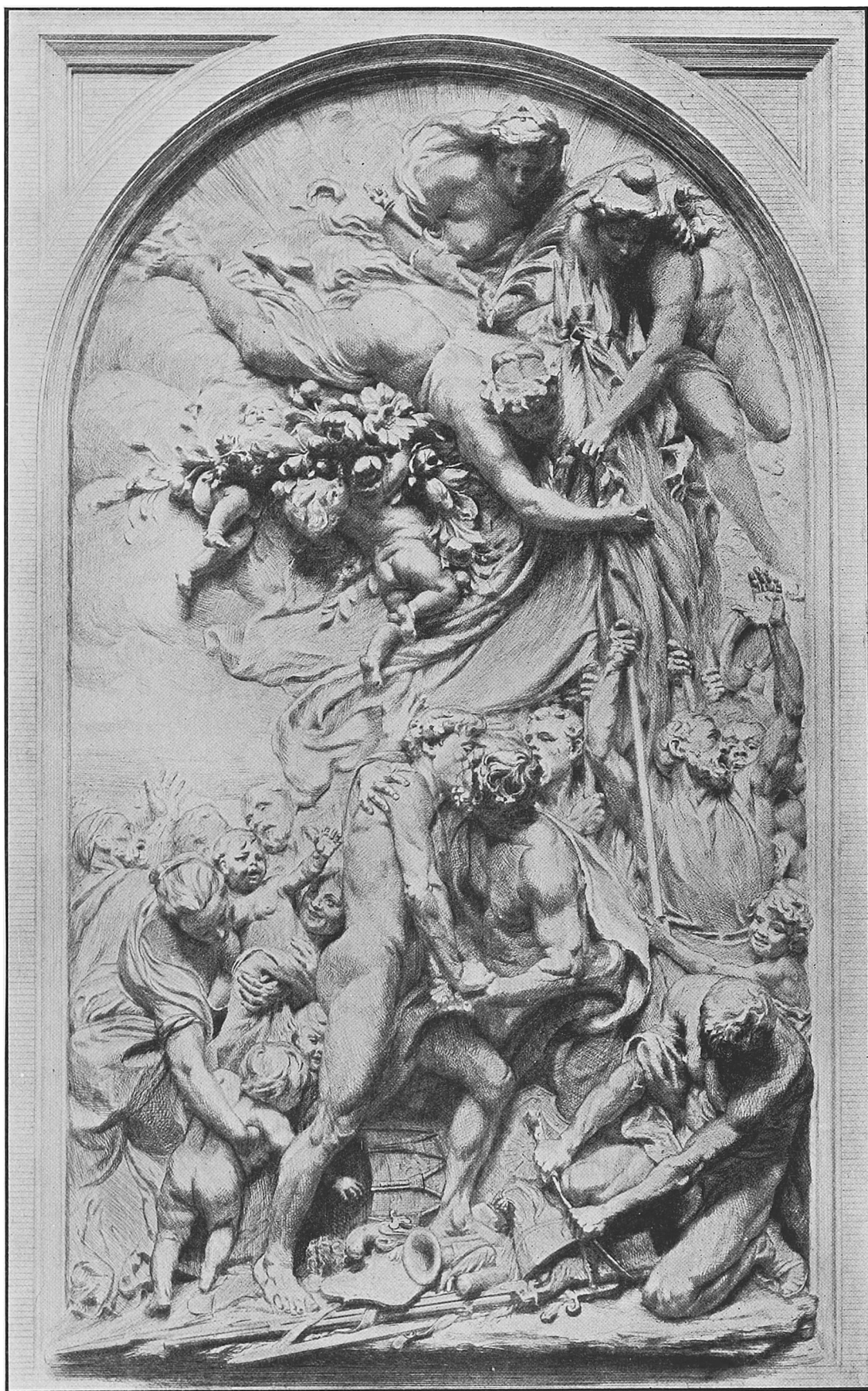
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"THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE REPUBLIC"

BY DALOU

An Un-academic Great Work of Art
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ANALYSIS OF WORKS OF ART

By Petronius Arbiter

AN UN-ACADEMIC GREAT WORK OF ART "THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE REPUBLIC"

BY DALOU

(See opposite page)

FOR a century attacks have been made upon all the art schools of the world, but particularly upon the Beaux-Arts of Paris, and this mostly by Frenchmen. The Beaux-Arts school is usually called the "Academy," and the chief insult hurled at it and its fruits is the epithet "academic." The majority of the critics of the Academy have always been French artists and the most bitter the disappointed artists. Hence most of them have been actuated largely by revenge. Others have been motivated by greed, and others merely by an egomaniacal rage to "run things" differently. The quarrels these critics have instigated in France resulted in good and evil, but the evil is the greatest, because as Shakespeare said: "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interréd with their bones." For the onslaughts upon the Academy have born bad fruit because they warped the minds of many who are not penetrative thinkers.

Even in this country there is the active but absurd pastime of "biffing" the Academy as an institution instead of attacking the weakness of its members. And yet not one of the critics of the Academy has clearly shown wherein lies the difference between un-academic work and such as is academic. We will try to do this once for all, in the interests of the American public, by comparing two works of two sculptors famous in France, and both pupils of the French Academy or of the Beaux-Arts school—Dalou and Lanson. We purpose to show why the work of Dalou is *un-academic* and great and why the work of Lanson is truly *academic* and merely clever.

It is more difficult for some sculptors to make a good bas-relief than it is to make a statue in the round. Because in a bas-relief, not only must the sculptor draw his figures true in movement but he must at the same time reduce the thickness of his figures—falsify this thickness—and yet make the flattened figure *appear round*. This process requires a more complicated mental operation than modeling in the round. This month we will discuss some bas-reliefs. And we will again state—

OUR STANDARD

The logical Standard of Art Measurement for a sure evaluation of Works of Art is based: on rare examples of the highest manifestations of the Six Elements of Art Power.

That is to say: The *greatest* work of Art in the World is that one in which we see manifested:

First: A *subject*, which is socially the most beneficent, of interest to the greatest number of people, and the noblest in *conception*;

Second: In which the *expression*—on the faces of the figures, in the details, and in the work as a whole—expresses profoundly that which the work is supposed to express;

Third: In which the *composition* is the most sublime;
Fourth: In which the *drawing* of all forms is the most true and effective in rendering *life*, above all,—*ideal life*;
Fifth: In which the *color* is the most varied and rich;
Sixth: In which the *surface technique* is the most vigorous, appropriate and unoffensively individual; the whole work of such a *quality*, and so co-ordinated, as to insure a *style*, at once *personal* yet *universal*, in which a *subject* is *expressed* with the greatest *completeness* and *harmony*: so as to stir the highest emotions of the largest number of cultured people for the longest period of time.

We consider a work of art *great* or *trivial* in ratio of the degree to which it measures up to this *standard*.

During the last hundred years France produced at least one hundred sculptors, who created one or more unforgettable pieces of sculpture. Among them are five, each of whom produced at least four masterpieces—Rude, Barrias, Dalou, Dubois and Mercié. Among these five one of the greatest—if not the very greatest—was Dalou. He was not only a wonderful craftsman but more, he was a poet and a great dramatist. And while he did not seek out the classically beautiful forms, often mis-called "academic," he did so respect the truth of natural forms that, while his forms are not classical, they are never ugly. In other words Dalou was a relative-realist as to following the fine forms of nature, while he was an idealist in regard to the choice of subjects and their composition, but above all because of the nobility of thought and feeling with which he invested nearly all he did.

Among the truly great works with which Dalou increased the renown of Paris is his wonderful heroic group in the exquisite garden of the Luxembourg Palace; "The Triumph of Silenus," the most delicious piece of riotous joy in bronze, perhaps, in all the world; the colossal "Triumph of the Republic" in the Place de la Nation, a tremendous work and worthy of the Republic; the splendid marble bas-relief in the House of Parliament—"Mirabeau and the Count de Brézé," the most *dramatic* and marvelously expressive bas-relief in the world next to Rude's "Departure" on the Arc de Triomphe, Paris; and finally his "Apotheosis of the Republic" of which we give an illustration.

This relief is about eighteen feet high by about eight feet wide. All the figures are life size. It is still in the plaster—the government having been too hard pressed to transfer it into marble or bronze. It is one of the three greatest compositions, in relief, of the Nineteenth century and shows French art at its highest, and explains why men of culture love Paris and the French soul, and why they say Paris is the home of the best and the worst.

To a man who knows what effort, blood and tears

it has cost the race to struggle up out of the slavery imposed upon it by the misguided Brahmanical priesthood in the hoary antiquity of the past, fathers of all the tyrannies and autocracies that have made of this world a Gehenna instead of a Paradise; to all those who adore liberty and loath all slaveries, this work by Dalou is one of the sublimest conceptions in all the art of the world. For it celebrates as magnificently as it has ever been done, the triumph of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity among men. Because from every inch of it radiates the feeling of triumph achieved through much sacrifice and self-abnegation by those heroes who gave and those who risked their lives that you and I, reader, might live—free! Of course to a man of a *slave* soul, to whom liberty is but an academic word—this work may not be emotion stirring. And there are alas! many such men.

Only once was that spirit of sacrifice so worthily expressed in sculpture—by Rude in his wonderful high-relief on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. As in that group the heroes of the nation are shown in the act of departing for the fight for liberty, and in this relief by Dalou they are shown as having triumphed, this relief ought to be put in the place occupied by the mediocre relief by Etex on the left side of the arch, one which shows the Apotheosis of Napoleon. Then there would be side by side the two most perfect works of two of the greatest sculptors produced by the French nation. Let the reader study this work:

Notice first the pyramidalization of the lower group, leading the mind up to the three figures floating above the lower group and symbolizing Liberty, Equality and Fraternity—this group making a circular mass, a principle of composition so successfully applied by Raphael in his "Transfiguration." These three figures, accompanied by two cupids, carry symbols of brotherly love, of glory, and honor to the flag of France and hail the victors.

In the center is the father embracing his returning son, who with one foot stamps on some arms and other insignia of war captured from the enemy. On the right is another returning soldier who is breaking a sword in two; on the left is a young boy reaching down to take a pistol which his mother prevents him from doing, thus helping out the suggestion of the entire lower group that militarism must be removed from the face of the earth. The whole work is splendid and radiates a spirit of joy and of liberation, and all the lines of the composition fill it with a lifting beauty. The whole tone of the work, its composition and spirit, place it among the highest ever composed in sculpture.

It is a magnificent example of the mingling of tradition and of independence in art. Because in this work Dalou followed the invulnerable *laws* of composition which no one can overlook if he wishes to be highly successful, and yet he broke through the petty *conventions* of his time—by giving to his forms an amplitude that strongly recalls the robust figures of Rubens, without losing either grace or individuality. It is this slight *accentuation* of the forms, this slight departure from Greek forms, without going to the extremes of the "deform-

mation of the form" this slight amplification of the form, in a *personal* way, as Michelangelo did it, without uglifying the form as Bandinelli and, later on, Rodin did—this is the first thing which makes the work un-academic. For the academic sculptor would have chosen a beautiful model and, without making any amplification or accentuation, would have *copied* the forms of his model as nature made them, being only careful to choose a beautiful model for his forms. This is the first difference between the academic and the non-academic.

The second difference is, that when it comes to the element of *expression*, the academic artist will fall short of complete and *profound* expression—so as to make a figure or a scene much more expressive than a figure or scene in nature would be. In other words, he will fail to make the work rise beyond the mere power of rousing the admiration of our intellect, and fail to make it powerful enough—just powerful enough—to stir the emotions of the soul. He will fail in this dramatic power, not because the Academy does not instruct him otherwise, or because it fails to insist on profound expression; but he will fail because he is only a clever workman and not a great dramatic sculptor. Thus it shows that this matter of "academicism" is a spiritual not a technical one, and not the result of any theories of art education or of practice in the schools.

Dalou was also a pupil of the Academy and he absorbed most of the *universal* principles of art taught in the Academy and he used them in all his works, and especially in this one; he was right in doing so, because those principles are eternal, because in harmony with the very structure of the mind and soul of man. Where he differed from the other sculptors trained in the Academy of the Beaux Arts was in being bold enough—above all powerful enough—to get slightly away from the leading strings of nature, and away from the merely clever copying of even a beautiful model, and he was strong enough to accentuate—not exaggerate—his forms and proportions to accentuate the expression of his work and in a manner to suit himself—and this, without going to any extremes. He dared but with self-control! He made his figure solid and full-fleshed—not fat. Therefore it is a striking example of what we have been trying to impress upon the public and the artists of America that it is possible to mingle with complete success the *impersonal* with the *personal*, law with liberty, conventionality with individuality.

The more one studies this work, especially the original in the Petit Palais in Paris, the more one feels that in this work Dalou expresses the French æsthetic temperament, the *French* soul with all its common-sense, its sanity, in not revolting against the immutable *laws*, while at the same time ignoring its petty *rules* to suit the will and taste of the individual sculptor. Therefore the work is both epochal and universal. And, as long as the plaster lasts it will be regarded by those who can think as the most magnificent of all tributes to the sublimity of the ideal—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.